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July 12, 1969

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Dinesh Singh, Foreign Minister of India
Ali Yavar Jung, Ambassador of India
K. B. Lall, Secretary of Commerce of India
Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President
Harold H. Saunders, NSC Staff
Clement E. Conger, Department of State

DATE AND PLACE: Thursday, July 10, at 4:30 p.m. in the President's
Oval Office

After the President had welcomed him, the Foreign Minister said that he brought greetings from the President and Prime Minister of India, who are looking forward to the President's visit. They regret that it will be so short.

The President agreed that his stay in India would be too short, but he felt that a short visit was better than none at all. He had every intention of making it as full as possible substantively. He hoped there would be ample opportunity for long substantive talks in which a lot of ground could be covered. He expected there would be a minimum of protocol type activities. With a smile, he said, "We can do that later; we hope to come back." He intimated that when he returned next time he would hope to be able to get outside the cities into the countryside as he had done in 1953 because he felt that it is impossible to know a country just from its cities.

The Foreign Minister said that the President's visit would provide an opportunity to see the changes that have taken place in India. The President replied that when he had last visited in 1967 it was just at the end of the two years of draught. He recalled how he was told by everyone then that, if India could just have a couple of years of good weather, it would make a great difference. Now this has happened, and Dr. Hannah had told him of the results it has produced.

Mr. Lall noted that extensive technological changes in agriculture had enabled India to produce more last year even though the monsoon was somewhat less than normal. The President said that he hoped to get a little feel for this progress on his coming trip but hoped to see more on a later visit. "There will be another time."

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Turning to a broader framework, the President said that he has traveled more in Asia than any other U.S. President, both as Vice President and as a private citizen. As he had noted in his article in Foreign Affairs a couple of years ago, Asia is "where the action is." There is more change in Asia; there are more people; that is where a great deal of the excitement will be in the last third of the century.

The President said that one purpose of his trip is to emphasize to Americans that we have an Asian role to play far beyond Vietnam. Our objective is not to dominate Asia but to play an important cooperative role.

The Foreign Minister agreed that Asia is hurrying to catch up. It has succeeded in arousing new expectations among its people. A much greater effort is now needed to bridge the gap between expectations and their realization. The President agreed that expectations create new problems, and the Foreign Minister went on to reiterate that Asia would have to make a great effort to keep up with them. Asia would have to combine development of its own resources with help from outside to meet this challenge.

The President said that when he looked back to his 1953 visit, he could not help but be deeply impressed by the enormous changes that had taken place since then, despite the remaining problems. It is this historical perspective that enables us to remain optimistic despite the great problems that remain.

Mr. Lall interjected that one important aspect of this change is that the large masses of people are now responding to it. The President said that he would like to see this at work in the villages of India. He had visited them in 1953 and expected that great changes had taken place since then. Mr. Lall replied that now there are new pressures on the government to provide seeds, fertilizers, pesticides.

Mr. Singh noted that wherever Federal officials go there are heavy pressures on them to provide these things. He noted that the Indian farmer feels that, because they represent the Federal rather than the State governments, they can do more than State government officials. The President smiled and said, "I know."

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The President noted that, while we are concerned about the forces of change, it would be worse if there were apathy. "Your people care." What is important are the people on the land, he said. Mr. Lall noted that there are still 76% of the people in India on the land.

Mr. Lall went on to note that as agricultural progress goes on, new problems are created in the cities. He mentioned Calcutta, and Mr. Singh agreed that there are very few cities in the world where there is such abject poverty.

Changing the focus, Mr. Singh said that India is working for the beginnings of Asian cooperation in economic development. The establishment of ECAFE and its Council of Ministers has been a major step forward in creating an Asian effort to this end. In addition, India is also trying to work out a series of arrangements for bilateral cooperation--not necessarily trade promotion but cooperative arrangements developed from an examination of the relative resources and needs of the parties involved.

India has, for example, moved toward a very close and deep cooperation with Iran for the joint exploitation of Iranian natural gas and the production of ammonia for fertilizer. With Ceylon, India is working in the joint sales promotion, processing and packaging of tea. India is working in similar ways with Afghanistan and Malaysia. The Indians feel that this kind of cooperation is real economic cooperation and not just trade promotion for India's own benefit. This kind of cooperation is being stimulated and aided by the ECAFE ministers.

The Minister then said he should be grateful to understand how the President envisaged future Asian cooperation. The President responded as follows:

First, he had always supported our economic development programs in Asia. He would be less than candid if he did not say that we have grave problems with our Congress when it comes to appropriating funds for these programs. When Congress gets in a mood to economize, the first things it cuts are the projects far from home. But the President said he saw it as vital to the U.S. and to other cooperating countries that these programs continue.

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Second, looking to the future, he saw a great need for the kind of cooperation which the Foreign Minister described--first bilaterally and then hopefully multilaterally and finally "on an all-Asian basis." The President felt that we had reached the time when people agree that Asians must solve Asian problems. We want to help, but they must provide the leadership. He would prefer that the leadership come from them rather than flow from the fact of the United States' great economic power.

Third, complicating this process will be the great power rivalries in the area. He was sure that the Foreign Minister had noted the Brezhnev proposal for Asian collective security, "whatever that means." India had also had its own difficult experiences with China.

The President said that he had a view of the posture we in the free world should take toward China which may differ somewhat from that usually expressed in the United States. He saw danger in playing the Soviet game if that game were arranged to isolate China. China is a great force in the world, and the Chinese are a strong people like the Indian people. The President felt that we should not play so much to one side that we isolate the other.

He noted that Prime Minister Gandhi in 1967 had seemed to share this view. There is a school of thought, he said, that the way to solve the China problem is to "gang up" on China. The President said he had no illusions about China and was making no apology for China. But as we looked down the road at the great Asian area, he felt that all Asia must eventually move forward together. Of course, he said we have to strengthen non-Communist Asia and its ability to defend itself. But he felt that we must go forward without isolating what will one day be one billion people.

The Foreign Minister said that he shared that view and knew that Prime Minister Gandhi is still of the same view. We cannot ignore China. We must try to bring China into the world community.

The President asked, "Can it be done?" He answered his own question by saying that it will depend on the leaders and we know so little about the younger leaders there.

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The Foreign Minister noted that at the last Communist party congress in China the leaders still emphasized their revolutionary motives which meant interference in the internal affairs of others. This may change. Their experiments have not stabilized China. Some change is bound to come because it is impossible to contain an energetic people indefinitely. India is maintaining its contact with China.

The President noted that there is one important aspect of India's relation to these developments in China. India is a parliamentary democracy and China has a different kind of system. If India does not make the grade, the example for the rest of the world will be profound.

The Foreign Minister felt India could demonstrate a great deal of success in this respect. Its democratic institutions have survived and progressed over a number of years, despite great problems. National integration is a difficult problem for India to handle with its great size and limited resources. Despite that, it had so far kept those problems under control without revolution. The Communists so far are working within the framework of the Constitution.

As for the Brezhnev proposal, he is talking about something that Asians have talked about for sometime. In this connection, India hopes for U.S. support in the efforts of Asians to cooperate. India is not, in this respect, necessarily asking for more aid, but he hoped that some of the aid we give might go to multilateral institutions to help build confidence in Asian cooperation.

The Foreign Minister explained the rationale for this economic cooperation as being a way for creating common interests among the Asians--first the cooperation in common economic concerns and then an evolving interest in the stability and security of the cooperating nations. He saw this as being done without mutual security pacts. He felt this kind of cooperation would create power to resist aggression because it would increase Asian commitment to defend what they themselves would have built. The capacity must be created through economic development to defend themselves but this will also lead to a commitment to protect the progress and institutions which they have built.

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The President said that he wanted to note one serious problem that would affect our ability to cooperate--the Vietnam war. "Speaking quite candidly, " he felt that Asian nations ultimately have a great stake in how that war ended. If the mass of Americans are disillusioned with the costs of the war and what it will have achieved, they will be unlikely to support extensive American cooperation with Asians in the future. If it ends in a way that enables Americans to feel that they have helped achieve something, then Americans will feel that their actions have helped create some chance for the people in that area to choose their own way of life and to improve it. So it is important for us in trying to work our way out of that war to do so in a way that will enable Americans to play a future role in Asia. This is "a great agony for us."

The Foreign Minister said that India did not wish to see frustration or defeat on either side.

The President felt that constructive proposals had been made on our side, and he informed the Foreign Minister that President Thieu of South Vietnam would be making an important statement that evening. He urged the Minister to read this carefully. This had been discussed at Midway and, the President felt, would represent significant progress.

The press was invited in for picture, and the conversation turned briefly to a lighter comment about the President's trip before the Foreign Minister's departure. As they were walking out the side door to the covered veranda, the President pointed out the cleat marks made on the floor just inside the door by President Eisenhower's golf shoes.

H. H. A.

Harold H. Saunders

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